

After-School Growth: What Young People Have to Say

A response to: “Democracy and Development: The Role of Outside-of-School Experiences in Preparing Young People to Be Active Citizens”

Bonny L. Gildin

ABSTRACT

In the context of a conference on after-school programs, sponsored by the nonprofit All Stars Project, youth from the organization's programs discuss their experiences and growth as citizens. Their discussion illustrates how outside-of-school social and cultural development helps disenfranchised youth to see themselves as part of the broader society and as having the capacity to shape that society and to lead others.

IN HER ARTICLE, “Democracy and Development: The Role of Outside-of-School Experiences in Preparing Young People to Be Active Citizens,” Carrie Lobman (2011) explores human development, understood as a socio-cultural-historical activity, as a foundation for democracy. She considers the role and special value of outside-of-school programs in producing this development. In reviewing the literature, she gives some attention to the performance model of after-school programs exemplified by the All Stars Project.

The All Stars Project has been creating and sponsoring after-school programs for 30 years and currently reaches about 10,000 young people in poor communities in New York City, Newark, Chicago, and the San Francisco Bay area. In addition to directly serving young people and communities, the All Stars Project has also looked to foster reflection and dialogue within the broader education and anti-poverty arenas on key conceptual, practical, and policy issues. Central to these dialogues have been the following concepts and understandings: the distinction between learning and development; the critical need to recognize and address the social and cultural underdevelopment of poor, Black, and Latino youth produced by chronic poverty; the relevance of innovative research on the practice of performance approaches for reinitiating development; and the ability of outside-of-school settings to rapidly produce development compared with in-school settings (All Stars Project, 2007; Fulani & Kurlander, 2009; Fulani & Newman, 2011).

On June 11, 2010, the All Stars Project organized a half-day conference in New York City, called “Afterschool: Growth, A conversation about afterschool between frontliners and innovators,” which brought together 100 after-school educators, young people, and innovators developing the field for a conversation on how after-school programs help young people to grow, and how we can develop the after-school movement.

The conference was hosted by Gabrielle L. Kurlander, president and CEO of the All Stars Project, Inc., and featured keynotes by Lucy N. Friedman, Ph.D., the president of the After-School Corporation, and Lenora B. Fulani, Ph.D., co-founder of the All Stars Project and the director of Operation Conversation: Cops and Kids. The conference also featured two panel discussions and a breakout session for discussion among participants. The first panel was a discussion among leaders of a number of innovative programs in New York City. The second panel, which is presented in full here, was entitled, “What Young People Have to Say.” Ms. Kurlander introduces All Stars alumnus Antoine “RL” Joyce, who moderates a dialogue with six youth participants of the All Stars Project programs. The panelists discuss their experiences in “afterschool” and emphasize the importance of qualitative, inexpensive programs that expose them to new opportunities and connect them to the

BONNY L. GILDIN, PhD, is the vice president of Education Initiatives at the All Stars Project, Inc.

broader world. The youth panelists are: Chris Elian, James McLain, George Pedraza, Faith Vann, Franceli Chapman, and Nyisha Edwards.

Their comments illustrate the ways in which developmental after-school programs have made possible the kind of “citizenship” growth where poor, Black, and Latino young people—among the most disenfranchised groups in America—come to see themselves as part of the broader society and as having the capacity to shape that society and to lead others. Also of note and relevance is the quality of their personal performances (how they are talking) as a component of their capacity to take the world somewhere new.

References

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